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ABSTRACT

The systematic investigation of children's development along cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions has illuminated the nature of maturation and the problems associated with this process. To study the relationship between child development and parent behavior, a method was designed for the systematic observation of parental behavior. Subsequently, the Checklist For Parents of Preadolescent Children, based on parents' self-reported behaviors, evolved, with potential use as an aid in the development and implementation of parent education programs. A pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted to determine its reliability. Parenting behaviors were found to be related to knowledge of preadolescent growth, communication skills, and stress management techniques. (Both the Checklist and the preferred answers are included in the document.) (JAC)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS OF PREADOLESCENT CHILDREN

by

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Doris B. Matthews, Ph.D., is professor of education at South Carolina State College. Her areas of interest include counselor education, educational psychology, and elementary and middle school curiculum. She is the author of numerous articles, instructional materials, and a filmstrip-tape program on "Parenting for the Preadolescent" produced by South Carolina State College in collaboration with the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, CSCE Grant No. 79-015-008.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS OF PREADOLESCENT CHILDREN

For several years, the senior author has pursued a lively interest in the relationship between parent behavior and child development. Systematic investigation of children's development along several dimensions (e.g., cognitive, affective, or moral development) has illuminated the nature of becoming mature and the problems associated with the process. Such new knowledge has challenged venerable child-rearing paradigms and has cast into obsolescence such once-honored dicta as "A child should be seen and not heard." Books, journal articles, and word-of-mouth communication have disseminated new insights in child development broadly among parents, but scholarly interest profitably may be directed to an analysis of the extent to which parental behavior has responded to these insights. An example may clarify this point. Parents may be well-informed concerning the use of the telephone as a valuable developmental tool for preadolescents, permitting at one time both intimate social sharing and a comfortable defensive shield. The scholar may inquire if the new insight into the developmental benefit of relatively unrestricted telephone usage for preteens has persuaded parents to tolerate their preadolescent's monopoly of the home telephone. In an important sense, inspection of parent behaviors may reveal gaps between developmental theory and parenting practice, or, on the other hand, convince developmental professionals that no gap exists.

In order to permit systematic observation of parent behaviors, a method must be established to operationalize them. The authors elected to develop a checklist based upon parents' self-reported behavior. Any gap between actual and self-reported behavior will contaminate observations made with such an instrument, but the possibility of such contamination is counterbalanced by two factors: (1) the greater ease of securing parental volunteers with a self-report; and (2) the reduction in such an investigation's cost compared to direct observation of parental behavior. In principle, the only direct observation which effectively would reduce the contaminating interaction between the subject and the observer must be covert, since parents who regard themselves under observation are likely to behave in unrepresentative, socially-approved ways. Atypical behavior of this kind would bias a direct observation as much as, and maybe more than, an indirect observation which relies upon self-report. Moreover, covert investigations of parent behaviors without parent consent are impractical within a free society. Thus, a self-report of parent behavior reveals itself to be the authors only practical means for studying parenting behavior.

In the following sections of the present paper, these topics will be discussed: the procedures used for selecting which parenting behaviors were to be observed, the procedure used to improve the checklist's content validity, and reports on a short pilot-test to improve the instrument's stability and to examine its factor structure.

Selecting the Parent Behaviors to Be Observed

The literature of child development is voluminous and, in a measure, self-contradictory. Thus, any attempt to select a set of relevant parenting behaviors for study is assured of controversy. Further, in order to sample usefully from among those possibly relevant behaviors, some attention must be directed to the age of the child toward whom these behaviors are to be directed. Clearly, where the parent's attitude regarding appropriate telephone usage may be important for the preadolescent, such an attitude bears less significantly on the infant. Because of projected needs in their own subsequent research and consonant with the senior author's recent research interest, the authors limited the parent population to parents of preadolescent children. Such children frequently attend middle schools, housing any or all grades between fifth and eighth grades. In this paper, preadolescents and middle school pupils are assumed to comprise an identical population.

Various books involving recent conceptualizations of the role of middle schools and the nature of the middle school student provided valuable information which suggested several parent behaviors which should be observed (Stamm and Nissman, 1979; Curtis and Bidwell, 1977; Klingele, 1979; Kindred, et al., 1976; Alexander, et al., 1969; Disque, 1973; and Sale, 1979). Books on parenting provided others (Callahan, 1973; Wood, et al., 1978; and Bigner, 1979). A final set of parent behaviors was drawn from the senior author's experience in helping parents reduce and manage the stress of surviving a preadolescent's development. The initial set of behaviors selected for observation, then, was subdivided into three categories:

1. Adolescent Growth and Development Information
2. Communication Skills
3. Tension Reduction Techniques

For each selected behavior, an item was written which consisted of a statement of personal behavior followed by three options: "often," "sometimes," and "never." Following is an example: "I insist that my child eat fruits and vegetables." For about half the items, "often" was the response most consistent with current developmental theory. For the other half, "never" was the correct response. Such reversal of items was arranged to reduce response set and to permit its identification when it occurred.

Improving Content Validity

A critique board was formed to judge items proposed for inclusion on the instrument, to be entitled "Checklist for Parents of Preadolescent Children" (CPPC). The critique board consisted of six persons: a school district psychologist, a child psychologist on a college faculty, a curriculum specialist, a middle school curriculum coordinator and two parents of middle school children (one man and one woman from different families).

Also, the instrument was criticized extensively by two graduate classes composed primarily of middle school teachers. These classes were taught by the senior author at Walterboro and Cheraw, South Carolina, in the summer of 1980. The authors reworked the instrument in response to suggestions from all of these groups. Finally, the instrument was evaluated and improved by the Committee on Faculty Research in the Department of Education, South Carolina State College. Having improved and adjusted the CPPC according to the collected judgment of four groups of parents and professional educators, the authors felt justified in their assessment that the CPPC was sufficiently content valid to undergo empirical pilot-testing.

Pilot-Testing of the CPPC

A convenience sample of 60 sets of parents was selected from the client population of a middle school in the South Carolina midlands. The sample was selected by the school's principal in order to maximize, as much as was possible in his judgment, the variation of parental behaviors and child rearing philosophies. Parents were invited to respond to the CPPC and to append any comments they considered useful to the instrument's planners. Forty-one parents responded from the 60 sampled. As requested, only one parent from each family, without collaboration with the other parent, completed the CPPC. Of 41 returned instruments, 40 were useful for analysis. At the end of two weeks, the same parents who responded were asked to respond to the instrument again, in order that the authors might assess the stability of the items. The second testing came as a surprise to respondents. Thirty usable forms were returned by the 40 solicited parents. Several parents appended useful notes and all seemed to have responded judiciously and quite cooperatively. Table 1, below, reports the patterns of response for the 48 initial items in both the early and late testings, but only responses from the 30 parents who responded twice are considered. Item responses for the two testings were submitted to a chi-square test of independence to test the null hypothesis that the two sets of responses were unrelated. When the probability of a true null exceeded 0.05, the item was judged unstable and was omitted. On such a criterion, Items 5, 25, 27, 28, 36, 41, and 47 were excluded. (Refer to Appendix A of this paper for the pilot-test version of the CPPC.) Item 13 was retained, although too little variability was discovered in the responses to test it statistically. Despite their low variability, the patterns of response reveal the item to have been answered consistently in the two testings.

The seven excluded items were these:

5) I expect my child to be even-tempered.

25) I discuss such topics as news stories, school activities, and other people with my child.

27) I expect my child to agree with me.

28) I listen to what my child has to say without interrupting.

TABLE 1

PILOT–TEST RESPONSE FREQUENCIES ON THE 48 ITEMS OF THE EARLIEST VERSION OF THE CPPC
(N = 30)

	First Testing			Second Testing				
Item No.	Often	Sometimes	Never	Often	Sometimes	Never	χ^2stat.	$p>\chi^2 \mid H_0$
1	22	8	0	20	8	2	14.91	0.00
2	0	5	25	0	5	25	17.33	0.00
3	11	17	2	9	17	4	28.14	0.00
4	17	11	2	18	9	3	11.28	0.02
5	17	10	3	6	21	2	8.46	0.08
6	8	17	5	10	13	7	17.42	0.00
7	9	16	5	8	16	6	28.91	0.00
8	12	12	5	16	10	4	11.99	0.02
9	3	7	20	6	10	14	25.54	0.00
10	5	12	13	3	8	19	22.83	0.00
11	20	6	4	22	6	2	19.23	0.00
12	5	13	12	7	10	13	11.78	0.02
13	0	0	30	0	2	28	---	--
14	19	8	3	18	11	1	16.60	0.00
15	14	11	5	14	14	2	25.07	0.00
16	16	11	3	15	13	2	12.26	0.02
17	2	7	21	4	10	16	19.29	0.00
18	12	15	3	12	15	3	36.34	0.00
19	15	11	4	14	11	5	31.17	0.00
20	3	6	21	3	5	22	20.13	0.00
21	7	12	11	2	21	7	11.72	0.02
22	13	14	3	12	15	3	20.21	0.00
23	14	14	2	11	18	1	11.08	0.03
24	7	14	9	5	16	9	22.30	0.00
25	27	3	0	22	7	1	3.52	0.17
26	24	4	1	20	9	1	34.10	0.00
27	1	24	4	0	25	5	0.38	0.83
28	14	14	2	1	13	16	3.56	0.17
29	22	6	2	22	7	1	32.76	0.00
30	3	13	14	4	12	14	9.52	0.05
31	2	16	12	3	14	13	24.56	0.00
32	20	9	1	19	8	3	25.95	0.00
33	8	17	5	13	11	6	21.55	0.00
34	8	17	7	11	14	5	21.62	0.00
35	12	14	4	11	14	5	11.65	0.02
36	20	9	1	17	12	1	6.18	0.19
37	4	15	11	5	15	10	13.96	0.01
38	6	21	3	5	24	1	13.79	0.01
39	5	19	6	5	20	5	15.42	0.00
40	26	4	0	25	5	0	23.08	0.00
41	8	18	4	5	24	1	4.28	0.37
42	2	11	17	3	12	15	12.06	0.02
43	5	14	11	5	15	10	19.70	0.00
44	3	7	20	1	11	18	25.87	0.00
45	8	16	6	8	18	4	21.81	0.00
46	16	14	0	14	16	0	8.41	0.01
47	6	7	17	8	7	15	9.14	0.06
48	8	10	12	4	13	13	28.60	0.00

36) I find time for family outings.

41) I speak to my child in a calm voice when s/he has done something unacceptable.

47) I save at least one activity for myself daily such as bicycling, walking, playing tennis, etc.

The item which showed virtually no variation in response was answered "never" by almost everyone. The item was, "I discourage my child from seeking work such as baby-sitting, cutting grass, or raking a yard." The work ethic seems alive and well in at least one American middle school!

The item responses from the first testing were used to identify any factor pattern within the responses. The larger number of subjects in the first test recommended its use for the factor analysis. Eliminating response vectors which contained missing values for some items reduced the usable number of respondents from 40 to 35. Such a small sample and such a large number of items (48) produces a sketchy factor analysis which cannot be interpreted with great confidence but which may prove stimulating to the researcher's insight. Of 34 possible orthogonal factors, fully 16 were identified with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The strongest 6 factors had eigenvalues of 4.31, 3.96, 3.28, 2.80, 2.49 and 2.18, indicating quite weak factors. On the basis of such low eigenvalues, the authors saw little basis for using factor scores from the instrument to achieve a data reduction in the analysis of the CPPC. Even though one may have expected some item subsets to vary consistently along an authoritative-permissive dimension, the complex factor structure was not unexpected. Most of the behaviors observed were anticipated to be idiosyncratic and relatively uninfluenced by the pattern of other behaviors. Though the writers always had expected to analyze each behavior individually, the allure of a potential data reduction and the hope of increased insight into an underlying stratum of parental predispositions motivated a brief look at a factor analysis of the data. The complexity which the analysis revealed makes the factor structure relatively useless for subsequent analysis.

The seven unstable items were deleted. The items were rearranged to a pattern suggested somewhat by the factor loadings, though the items may have been ordered as reasonably at random. The form was modified very slightly to assist in keypunching data from it. On the perceptive advice of one parent-respondent in the field test, a somewhat difficult statement to interpret logically was reversed to a simpler form. Item 31, which stated, "I do not share family problems with my child," became, instead, "I share family problems with my child."

The completed instrument, revised by the pilot-test, appears in Appendix B. In Appendix C the preferred answers to the revised version can be found. Further information on the test is available from the authors upon request. Comments and suggestions will be received gratefully when addressed to Professor Doris Matthews, Department of Education, South Carolina State College, Orangeburg, South Carolina 29117.

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APPENDIX A

PILOT–TEST VERSION OF THE CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS OF PREADOLESCENT CHILDREN

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS OF PREADOLESCENT CHILDREN

Parent's Name _____ **Child's Name** _____

Directions: **Read the questions below and mark the column that best describes your parenting behavior. Read the example below before beginning to respond.**

Example: *My child eats breakfast at school.* *Often* *Sometimes* *Seldom*

If your child usually or always eats breakfast at school, you should place a check mark in the column headed "Often." If your child rarely or never eats breakfast at school, mark the column headed "Seldom." If these answers seem too extreme, mark the column headed "Sometimes."

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom
1. I insist that my child eat fruits and vegetables.			
2. I discourage my child from inviting friends to the house.			
3. I permit the telephone to be used for socializing.			
4. I discuss with my child the changes occurring in his/her body.			
5. I expect my child to be even-tempered.			
6. I require my child to go on a family outing even though s/he prefers to stay at home.			
7. I control the manner in which my child spends money.			
8. I accept the fact that my child is now more awkward than before preadolescence.			
9. I allow my child's participation in unsupervised activities.			
10. I guide my child away from tasks that are too difficult.			
11. I encourage my child to participate in individual and group sports.			
12. I encourage my child to visit a number of work places to become acquainted with various occupations.			
13. I discourage my child from seeking work such as babysitting, cutting grass, or raking a yard.			
14. I buy cooperative games and cards to have around the house.			
15. I allow my child to cook and serve some meals.			
16. I accept the idealistic expectations my child holds for me and try to live up to them as much as possible.			
17. I criticize my child's excessive concern with his/her physical appearance.			
18. I understand why it is necessary for my child to buy shirts, jeans, blouses, etc., like the friends even though other other brands are cheaper.			
19. I talk to my child about sex and the responsibility associated with it.			
20. I am reluctant to give my child compliments.			
21. I am critical of my child's behavior.			

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom
22. I seek my child's suggestions on family decisions.			
23. I provide several choices rather than decide an issue for my child.			
24. My child's restlessness disturbs me.			
25. I discuss such topics as news stories, school activities, and other people with my child.			
26. I recognize special days in the life of my child.			
27. I expect my child to agree with me.			
28. I listen to what my child has to say without interrupting.			
29. I touch or hug my child or show other signs of physical affection.			
30. I discuss my dissatisfactions with the school in the presence of my child.			
31. I do not share family problems with my child.			
32. I discuss stories from my childhood with my child.			
33. I encourage my child to discover and appreciate the family's historical roots.			
34. I engage in frank discussions of sexual issues with my child.			
35. I consider my child's opinion before making a family decision.			
36. I find time for family outings.			
37. I feel betrayed when my child keeps secrets from me.			
38. I consider my child's idea to be as good as mine.			
39. I remain calm when my child loses his/her temper.			
40. I read newspapers, magazines, and books in the presence of my child.			
41. I speak to my child in a calm voice when s/he has done something unacceptable.			
42. I use physical punishment to shape my child's behavior.			
43. I am tolerant of loud volume levels on radio, TV, and record player.			
44. I become critical when my child laughs, giggles, or talks incessantly with a friend.			
45. I object when the telephone line is tied up for long periods of time.			
46. I give directions and assignments in a matter-of-fact voice to my child.			
47. I save at least one activity for myself daily such as bicycling, walking, playing tennis, etc.			
48. I pursue independent activities other than work away from the family.			

APPENDIX B

FINAL VERSION OF THE CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS OF PREADOLESCENT CHILDREN

CHECKLIST FOR PARENTS OF PREADOLESCENT CHILDREN

Parent's Name _____ **Child's Name** _____

Check appropriate box:
☐ MOTHER ☐ FATHER
☐ GUARDIAN

Check appropriate box:
☐ BOY ☐ GIRL

Directions: **Read the questions below and mark the column that best describes your parenting behavior. Read the example below before beginning to respond.**

Example: *My child eats breakfast.*

Often	Sometimes	Seldom

If your child usually or always eats breakfast, you should place a check mark in the column headed "Often." If your child rarely or never eats breakfast, mark the column headed "Seldom." If the answers seem too extreme, mark the column headed "Sometimes."

Often	Sometimes	Seldom

1. I consider my child's opinion before making a family decision.
2. I discuss stories from my childhood with my child.
3. I touch or hug my child or show other signs of physical affection.
4. I encourage my child to discover and appreciate the family's historical roots.
5. I engage in frank discussions of sexual issues with my child.
6. I provide several choices rather than decide an issue for my child.
7. I discuss with my child the changes occurring in his/her body.
8. I buy cooperative games and cards to have around the house.
9. I seek my child's suggestions on family decisions.
10. I am reluctant to give my child compliments.
11. I allow my child to cook and serve some meals.
12. I encourage my child to participate in individual and group sports.
13. I insist that my child eat fruits and vegetables.
14. I use physical punishment to shape my child's behavior.
15. I feel betrayed when my child keeps secrets from me.
16. I guide my child away from tasks that are too difficult.
17. I become critical when my child laughs, giggles, or talks incessantly with a friend.

Often	Sometimes	Seldom

18. I pursue independent activities other than work away from the family.
19. I remain calm when my child loses his/her temper.
20. I criticize my child's excessive concern with his/her physical appearance.
21. I am critical of my child's behavior.
22. I understand why it is necessary for my child to buy shirts, jeans, blouses, etc. like his/her friends even though other brands are cheaper.
23. My child's restlessness disturbs me.
24. I discourage my child from inviting friends to the house.
25. I permit the telephone to be used for socializing.
26. I require my child to go on a family outing even though he/she prefers to stay at home.
27. I control the manner in which my child spends money.
28. I accept the fact that my child is now more awkward than before preadolescence.
29. I allow my child's participation in unsupervised activities.
30. I encourage my child to visit a number of work places to become acquainted with various occupations.
31. I discourage my child from seeking work such as babysitting, cutting grass, or raking a yard.
32. I accept the idealistic expectations my child holds for me and try to live up to them as much as possible.
33. I talk to my child about sex and the responsibility associated with it.
34. I recognize special days in the life of my child.
35. I discuss my dissatisfactions with the school in the presence of my child.
36. I share family problems with my child.
37. I consider my child's idea to be as good as mine.
38. I read newspapers, magazines, and books in the presence of my child.
39. I am tolerant of loud volume levels on radio, TV, and record player.
40. I object when the telephone line is tied up for long periods of time.
41. I give directions and assignments in a matter-of-fact voice to my child.

APPENDIX C

PREFERRED ANSWERS FOR CPPC

PREFERRED ANSWERS FOR CPPC

Item		Item	
1.	Often	22.	Often
2.	Often	23.	Seldom
3.	Often	24.	Seldom
4.	Often	25.	Often
5.	Often	26.	Seldom
6.	Often	27.	Seldom
7.	Often	28.	Often
8.	Often	29.	Often
9.	Often	30.	Often
10.	Seldom	31.	Seldom
11.	Often	32.	Often
12.	Often	33.	Often
13.	Often	34.	Often
14.	Seldom	35.	Seldom
15.	Seldom	36.	Often
16.	Often	37.	Often
17.	Seldom	38.	Often
18.	Often	39.	Often
19.	Often	40.	Seldom
20.	Seldom	41.	Often
21.	Seldom		